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Affective Labors: Love, Care, Solidarity in the Social Reintegration of Female Ex-Combatants in Colombia

María Estrada-Fuentes

ABSTRACT In the Battlefield What can you tell me about love? This question was often followed by a combination of nervous laughter and bitter smiles. Thoughtful silence. As if love could not be part of life in the guerrilla ranks. As if love was not part of everyday life in times of war. Perhaps the former [...]

In the Battlefield

What can you tell me about love?

This question was often followed by a combination of nervous laughter and bitter smiles. Thoughtful silence. As if love could not be part of life in the guerrilla ranks. As if love was not part of everyday life in times of war. Perhaps the former guerrillas I was interviewing thought I was asking about a specific type of romantic love, such as the kind of love stories one learns from popular Mexican, Colombian, and Venezuelan telenovelas.¹ Perhaps they thought my question assumed this prototypical, painful narrative of romantic love was the only possible way for people to experience love. And the answer would go something like this:

Love... it is not like that, not like here. It is different. Back there you just... there is no stability. You have to ask for authorization from the commander, you cannot get involved with someone unless you are serious, then once you have been granted permission you can sleep in the same tent if you have one. Everyone respects that; no one is allowed to start messing around. But you know you can be sent off to a different unit anytime, or your partner can be killed in combat, so you don't get attached. Sometimes you hear that your partner gets involved with someone new. You have to move on, you find someone else. Or you can stay alone if you want to, that's ok too.

I wanted to learn about love, about how people allow themselves to be touched, or not, in the battlefield. I wanted to hear about love in the words of the once tough combatants; to ask about sex and consent, to learn about rape and abortion policies within the Colombian guerrilla ranks without being too intrusive, and the love question helped me: it was vague enough to start an innocent conversation and I could see, in their bodily reactions, whether I could follow-up with a relevant discussion. I wanted to ask the questions that would lead to insightful answers, but I had to be careful. I wanted to inquire about different ways and possibilities of understanding and participating in love-based relationships in the context of guerrilla warfare, but I did not want to do away with the layers of protection interviewees—and myself for that matter—might have wanted to use

for cover when talking to a stranger, especially regarding subjects' past involvement in on-going war. Whether I interviewed men or women, the distinction between *here* and *there* was always present. *There* indicated not only a different place but also a different time, a *past stage* where experiences of romantic love may or may not be possible. *There* people love and protect their partners and comrades during combat; rank-and-file members must learn how to make coffee and cook for hundreds at a time without making noise or producing too much smoke; some are trained to be nurses, surgeons, and are experts at healing each others' wounds. Back *there* some people refuse to execute individuals under risk of punishment, while others are very good and enjoy following those orders.²

Back *there*, in the *Ejército de Liberación Nacional* (National Liberation Army, hereafter "ELN")³ rank-and-file guerrillas can request permission to have life-partners and children—which can be denied; but in the *Fuerzas Armadas Revolucionarias de Colombia* (Revolutionary Armed Forces of Colombia, hereafter "FARC"),⁴ they cannot request authorization for having kids—however sometimes they hide their pregnancies and give birth. In the Colombian guerrilla ranks all women, regardless of age, use hormonal contraception—usually injections, and if they get pregnant they must have an abortion every single time; but not all the Colombian guerrilla groups engage with the same disciplinary practices. In the guerrilla ranks all members have equal rights and obligations, but commanders' partners are allowed to have their babies and see their children grow. In the battlefield men and women of all ages are raped, but they also make love.

In this article I am concerned with how affective transactions and related practices of love, care, and solidarity are experienced and thought through by former female combatants who were mostly recruited as children.⁵ I propose the concept of "affective labors" to understand female experiences and affective practices within guerrilla organizations. I argue that by focusing on the performativity of human emotions and transactions present in military structures, policymakers and peace-building practitioners could improve the management of human and financial resources and, subsequently, facilitate social reintegration.

With this I intend to contribute narrative possibilities for subjects' existence, and thus pathways for different options to leverage justice for Colombian citizens who have been part of illegal armed organizations and are now subject to reintegration programs. The reiteration of regulatory and affective practices in the guerrillas produce combatant "units" that conform to disciplinary codes and expectations, which draw the limits on what is a viable life within the ranks. In this article I propose that the process of subjectification in the guerrillas and its iterative qualities are similar to that which produce civilians through reintegration programs. I argue that the promise of intelligibility inherent in both guerrilla (illegal) and civilian (legal) performances is also a promise for continued existence. In her influential book *The Psychic Life of Power: Theories in Subjection*, Judith Butler argues that the desire to be visible, to be considered worthy and survive, is an exploitative desire. Subjects, she suggests, would prefer to exist in subordination than not exist. Existence is therefore not limited to subjects' intelligibility; it also implicates the possibility of death. She writes, "The one who holds out the promise of continued existence plays to the desire to survive"⁶ and as such, performances of subjection through affective labors—however destructive these may be—are also a means to make one's life a life that qualifies as one worth living.⁷

Love Labor: Primary Care and Retention Practices in the Guerrilla Ranks

Most times my love-question was interpreted as an inquiry about romantic love, but my interest was not solely on the latter: enquiring about the ways in which combatants experience love and engage in love-labor gives us an insight into the ways in which they conceive and experience care, attachment to others, and participate in practices of solidarity before, during, and after enlistment. Scott Gates emphasizes the need to understand the differences between recruitment motivations, retention in the armed group, and related practices of socialization. He suggests that by working towards a better understanding of retention processes instead of solely focusing on motivations and drivers at recruitment, we may find critical information that can assist in the effective design of reintegration programs.⁸ In my work I consider that the affective dimensions of warfare are not only helpful but also crucial in identifying and understanding the needs of citizens who have been part of illegal armed organizations and are now trying to re-build their lives in civilian contexts.⁹ A comprehensive approach to affect in recruitment, retention, and defection/disassociation provides important information in the design and implementation of relevant reintegration assistance.

In their study of the production of affective equality and inequality within social systems and practices of care, Kathleen Lynch and Judy Walsh provide a distinction between three different types of other-centered work required to sustain primary, secondary, and tertiary care relations. In order to maintain secondary and tertiary care relations, general care-work and solidarity-work are required. Primary care relations, the authors argue, are not sustainable over time without love-labor. "Without such labouring, feelings of love or care for others can simply involve rhetorical functionings, words and talk that are declaratory in nature but lack substance in practice or action."¹⁰ Primary care or love relations:

refer to relations of high interdependency that arise from inherited or chosen dependencies or interdependencies and are our primary care relations. Love labouring is the work required to sustain these relations...is *emotionally engaged* work that has as its principal goal the survival, development and/or well-being of the other. There is an intense sense of *belongingness* and *trust* in primary care relations when they are positive, and of distrust and isolation when they are neglectful, exploitative or abusive that does not hold for other care relations [emphasis in original].¹¹

The authors indicate that the most obvious type of love care-relationship is that which exists between parents and children: it is essential for survival, has the potential of being mutually beneficial and is characterized by marginal or non-existent immediate gain for the carer.¹²

Guerrilla combatants are not entirely deprived of love and care, or primary care, or love relationships: they are part of networks of affect and solidarity that provide support and generate a strong sense of belonging, sometimes deep trust, but that also make them extremely vulnerable. Whether through experiences of romantic-love, camaraderie, or friendships—what I would like to call affective socialization practices—guerrillas develop emotional attachments characterized by a high sense of interdependency and feelings of familial belonging. Writing about comrades that died during confrontations with the Colombian military, former FARC guerrilla member Zenaida Rueda writes: "They were my brothers, my cousins, my uncles...they were my family. That is what the guerrilla becomes for us: family"¹³ ([e]llos eran mis hermanos, mis primos, mis tíos...eran mi familia. Eso se vuelve la guerrilla para uno.)¹⁴ Primary care or love relations also give rise to fear, distrust, and emotional isolation, and the dynamics and possibilities for love and romantic love relationships to flourish depend on other primary-care relationships. During one of

my interviews, when I asked Tatiana¹⁵ about love, this nineteen year-old former FARC member said:

At the beginning, feeling attracted to someone else was beautiful. But as time goes on, they [commanders] make you turn into an aggressive, guarded person, like a cat, because sometimes you try to be with someone and commanders start sending you off somewhere else so you cannot be together, or they do things so you don't get along. And so you become aggressive, wary from others. ...At the end one wouldn't care about being with someone. If he could stick around it was ok and if not it was ok too. One would say "It doesn't matter, there are plenty more men here." In that way, you become like a man.¹⁶ (Al principio, la sensación de atracción a otra persona es muy bonito. Pero a uno lo vuelven como agresivo, como un gato, porque aveces uno trata de atraerse [estar juntos] con esa persona y cuando los comandantes ven que uno está con esa persona comienzan a abrirlo para allá, abrirlo para acá, comienzan a hacerle cualquier cosa para que uno choque. Entonces ya uno se va volviendo agresivo. ...A lo último a uno le valía ya una, discúlpeme la palabra, una pendejada estar con alguien, si él llegaba bien y si no también. Uno decía "No, para eso hay más." Ya uno andaba como hombre.)

M: Did you fall in love there? (¿Y tu te enamoraste allá?)

T: [Nervous laughter] Yes. Once. I had been in the guerrilla for about five years. I fell in love with a comrade I had been with for two years. But a snake bit me, and he was very anxious and worried and the commander didn't like it when a man cared like that for a woman, or the other way around, because they think that they will lose that combatant, that you are going to get bored in the guerrillas, lose morale, and that you will desert. So they sent him off and away from me. I was very sick....He died in combat. I was very hurt. The commanders wouldn't tell me he was dead because they knew I was willing to die for him, and he felt the same. So they lied for a week....I was depressed for seven months, but I could not let them know how I felt. The first day it was ok to show my sadness, but then I had to hide my feelings. They could get the wrong idea, that I wanted to desert, and they could kill me because of this. ([Risa nerviosa] Sí. Una vez. Llevaba por ahí cinco añitos [en la guerrilla], de un compañero con el que llevaba dos años ya viviendo [juntos]. A mí me picó una culebra, y él se desesperó mucho y al comandante no le gusta que un hombre se preocupe así por una mujer, o una mujer [por un hombre] porque piensan que van a perder ese combatiente, el hombre se va a aburrir, se va a ir, se va a desmoralizar. A él lo sacaron de donde yo estaba, porque yo estaba enferma....Murió en una acción. A mí me dio duro. Ellos [los comandantes] no me querían decir a mí porque sabían de que yo daba la vida por él, igualmente él por mí. Entonces a mí me mintieron por una semana....Me dolió mucho, yo estuve siete meses así [triste] pero yo no podía demostrarlo. El primer día, claro, porque los comandantes me entendían. Pero de ahí para allá no podía, porque pensaban que yo me iba a ir [desertar], empezaban a pensar mal de mí, me podían matar.)

Tatiana was one of four siblings, the only female. She was forcibly recruited by the FARC when she was twelve years old by a FARC member who was eight years older and romantically interested in her. Tatiana said that on the first night she was in the guerrilla camp they slept together and that it was very hard for her because she had never slept with anyone else.¹⁷ She thought about leaving the group a few times, during her first years, but she was afraid of doing so and she eventually adapted to life in the guerrillas. When I asked what happened to her recruiter, whom she referred to as her "partner," she

said he was murdered just a month after she joined the group, and that despite what he did to her she was grateful to him because he helped her to adapt quickly and understand the group dynamics. She left the FARC because she was captured by members of the Colombian Military when she was seventeen years old.

Talking about love, trust and care practices, Tatiana described how everyday activities were an opportunity to demonstrate feelings of fondness among friends and partners, such as washing each others' clothes or cleaning their boots. While it is forbidden to help each other in these tasks, guerrillas do so when they want and feel they need to:

We support each other, but commanders don't like that. They say: "Ah, we are losing her, she is in love."...Love there is beautiful because one needs companionship, support, but it is also dangerous for you because of the things you might do to be able to be with that person, or maybe when you realize your partner died, and one feels lonely (Uno se apoya, y a los comandantes no les gusta eso. Ahí dicen: "Ya la estamos perdiendo, ya se enamoró."...El amor allá, a la vez que es bonito, porque uno necesita una compañía, también lo hace correr peligro, porque uno [hace cosas] para estar con esa persona, o que uno sepa que se ha muerto y uno allá se siente solo.)

The physical and emotional effort invested in the survival of oneself and others, in sustaining these primary care relations, is love-labor. "Love labour is generally characterised by relations of strong mutuality; there is a sense of mutual dependence no matter how poor the relationship may be."¹⁸ How does this love-labor affect everyday life and decisions within the guerrilla ranks?

In her autobiography *Escrito para no morir: bitácora de una militancia*, the anthropologist and former Movimiento 19 de Abril (19th of April Movement, hereafter "M-19")¹⁹ guerrilla member, María Eugenia Vásquez Perdomo, writes that love in the guerrillas was part of their wider, communal political project, not a personal project. Romantic love relationships were intense but transient, because they were limited by their political quest for social change, not individual desires, personal attachments, and expectations: "We loved each other with the intensity that comes with the uncertainty of tomorrow and the trust of being among equals."²⁰ (nos quisimos con la intensidad que proporciona la incertidumbre frente al mañana y con la confianza de estar entre iguales.)²¹ There was little or no investment in building long-term romantic relationships, and instead affective relationships were based on a sense of trust and camaraderie among equals. Sexual encounters among romantic partners were, in the context of the M-19 and according to Vásquez Perdomo, just a way to freely express feelings of closeness to a person with ideological affinity, who was also a member of the guerrilla organization.²² However, in her narrative of life as an university student, and an urban-based guerrilla member during the seventies and eighties, Vásquez Perdomo describes multiple romantic relationships, including two marriages, affective attachments, motherhood, and gendered expectations for sexual and social behaviours, even within the guerrillas. For instance, motherhood in the seventies, during her first marriage to another M-19 guerrilla, turned Vásquez Perdomo into a stay-at-home mother, while her husband continued with his militant activities. "Our partnership had been exhausted by the daily routine and was drowning in contradictions. The discourse about relationships between compañeros was a far cry from the reality."²³ (Nuestro amor se agotaba en la cotidianidad y naufragaba en sus contradicciones. Una cosa era el discurso sobre las relaciones de pareja entre compañeros y otra bien distinta la realidad)²⁴ she writes, suggesting a clear distinction between discourses of gender and gender equality within militant contexts, and lived experience. She continues:

In spite of the fact that we had both been involved in militant activity since before we lived together, now his work came first. He could do as he would with his time; I had the domestic chores and the baby. At most Ramiro “helped” with some things, and according to a lot of *compañero* couples, I should have thanked him for his help. I myself thought his job justified his many absences.²⁵ (Si bien ambos teníamos una actividad militante desde antes de vivir juntos, ahora la que se priorizaba era la suya. Él disponía del tiempo a su amano, yo tenía las obligaciones domésticas y de crianza; a lo sumo Ramiro me “ayudaba” en algunas tareas y, según muchos *compañeros* y *compañeras*, yo debía agradecer su colaboración. Yo misma pensaba que su trabajo justificaba muchas ausencias.)²⁶

Vásquez Perdomo indicates that romantic-love relationships were understood as relationships among equals—entre iguales, however, house management and care-labor were considered female tasks, and the participation of men in these were regarded as acts of kindness, not as routine labor distribution in a relationship *among equals*.

In another section of her autobiography Vásquez Perdomo reflects on the intensity of her experiences of romantic love, bodily reactions and feelings attached to these, and writes about the pain she experienced the last time she saw one of her romantic partners, Alfredo:

When I lost him from sight, I consulted for a moment the measure of his absence, and a dull pain in every fibre of my being revealed the dimension of the emptiness. I wanted to shout, cry and run until I couldn't run anymore. I wanted to somehow deaden the pain, to flee from it, but I stayed right there, outwardly calm, with a commitment that went beyond love.²⁷ (Cuando lo perdí de vista consulté por un instante la medida de su ausencia y un dolor sordo en cada fibra del cuerpo delató la dimensión del vacío. Habría querido gritar, llorar y correr, hasta agotar mis fuerzas, por no sentir, pero me quedé allí aparentemente tranquila, con un compromiso que iba más allá del amor.)²⁸

This description of pain in the absence of the other suggests romantic-love relationships and encounters were not so transient, after all. Vásquez Perdomo envisioned a personal project, she desired a present and future life with Alfredo. A few months after the separation she received the news of his death—he was shot in his forehead during combat, and she writes:

Alfredo was my emotional axis. As long as he had lived I had felt the certainty of love: it was both of us against the world. Now he had left me alone. At first the feeling of abandonment assaulted me, and I was angry at the way he'd let himself be killed.²⁹ (Alfredo constituía mi eje afectivo. Mientras existió, sentía la certeza del amor: estábamos ambos frente al mundo. Ahora me había dejado sola. En un principio me asaltó la sensación de abandono y de rabia con él, por dejarse matar.)³⁰

Love, despite Vasquez Perdomo's claims of the communal character of it, was not therefore solely defined by the political goals of the M-19. The death of her partner meant, for her, the death of the possibility for an affective personal project, the termination of a romantic partnership with her comrade still *within their* communal, political project.

Vásquez Perdomo left the M-19 in 1988, a year before the collective demobilization of the M-19 and after eighteen years of service: she talked with her commanders and expressed that she no longer wanted to be part of the organization. She decided to leave

partly because of the sudden death of her eldest son when he was thirteen years old—she had two children with two different partners during her militant years. Her request for disassociation was approved without further complications. Working in the guerrillas was, for her, a means for building a better future for her son while waiting for the possibility of a re-encounter with him. But with his death, the years of sacrifice, absence, and renunciation to be close to him no longer made sense for her. “It seems impossible that so much love could have no future, but there was nothing left, only an intense emptiness.”³¹ (Parecía mentira que tanto amor se volviera huérfano de futuro.)³² Despite the urban-based nature of most of her militant years, her re-adaptation to civilian life was an extremely difficult and painful process as will be further discussed below.

Experiences of absent motherhood or the forced termination of pregnancies often trigger feelings of disillusionment, betrayal, and resentment among the guerrillas. These are illustrative of how important primary care, love relationships, and related labor are in relation to retention possibilities in the armed group. And it is the same for retention in reintegration programs. This was the case for Diana the thirty-year-old woman that I interviewed. Diana was one of six siblings in a single parent household. Her father died when she was six years old and her mother was forced to move to a different city, leaving her children, so she could work and provide for them. She requested enrolment in the guerrillas when she was approximately fifteen years old—she could not recall her exact age, sometime between 1999 and 2000—as she was promised clothes, food, and access to education. Echoing the situation of many others when they join the group, she realized life within the ranks was not easy, and that the initial promises to cover her basic needs were not going to be fulfilled—they never were for her—and she tried to quit, but she was not allowed to leave as enrolment in the FARC is a life-long commitment. Guerrillas who desert the armed group do so risking their lives as, often, the punishment for unsuccessful defection is death. Eventually Diana got used to being a guerrilla. When I asked what were the things she enjoyed the most about her life in the FARC, she said that the feelings of brotherhood and mutual care were the things she liked the most: “It feels as if they were all one person—*todos son como una misma persona*.” But when I asked her about the things that she did not like *there* she immediately said “almost everything—*casi todo*,” and that she was never happy: “The lack of freedom, waking up at five AM, wearing a wet military uniform, and staying like that all day long, how could I possibly like that?” (La falta de libertad. La vida militar, la vida guerrillera. Levantarse a las 5am y ponerse un camuflado mojado para estar así todo el día. A mí qué me va a gustar eso.) She also said she did not agree with several guerrilla practices, such as selective killings, extortion, kidnapping, and the murdering of innocent people during combat.³³ Despite the difficulties, she found in the FARC a family, companionship, a group of people that, in her view, truly cared for each other. She also had two romantic partners during her years of enlistment, and got pregnant twice. Each time, following the rules of the FARC, she had abortions. In this context of deep feelings of inter-dependence with her comrades and partners, Diana’s forced abortions mark significant ruptures for her.

Diana and I had coffee and chocolates during our interview³⁴ and after some small talk I asked: “How long ago did you desert the guerrillas?” (¿Hace cuánto saliste de la guerrilla?) “I left fifteen months ago. They forced me to have an abortion, and that was the second time.” (Hace un año y tres meses. Yo me fui porque me hicieron abortar, esa fue la segunda vez.) After twelve years of service, she was forced to have an abortion three months before her baby was due. She had a stable partner and this was her second pregnancy. In both cases, and following the rules of the FARC, she notified her commander so they could proceed with the mandatory abortions. The first pregnancy was terminated without further complications. But the second time that she informed them about her condition, her warnings were ignored. When she was six months into her pregnancy they decided to

proceed with the abortion, against her will. "When you are six months into your pregnancy, the baby is fully formed. If we had had an incubator there, my baby could have survived. I saw him." (A los seis meses el niño está formado. Si hubiera habido una incubadora allá el niño se hubiera salvado. Yo lo vi.) In our conversation she stated that this was the main reason for her to defect from the guerrillas: after over a decade of service, she was too hurt and disappointed with the way in which the FARC, her family, handled her situation. In her view, commanders were negligent because she followed the rules, she informed them that she was pregnant at an early stage so they could conduct the abortion, but they seemed careless. For her, this was an extremely disappointing and painful experience and she blames her commander for not showing sufficient attention and not addressing her pregnancy warnings in time so the doctors could take care of it. In Diana's view, her commander decided not to honor her willingness to follow FARC's internal regulations regarding pregnancies; and in his failure to act on her announcement without delay, he failed to do his part in order to sustain their care-relationship: there was no effort, on his side, to guarantee her wellbeing. By neglecting her willingness to abort in the first place, consequently abusing her body and emotional attachments to her unborn child, the commander broke Diana's feelings of belongingness, trust, and dependency to the FARC, to her family, and with this he triggered feelings of isolation in her to the point that she chose desertion. But her disappointment had an additional, closely related dimension: the degradation of the guerrilla in the area where she was an active member and the lack of interest of the commanders in the wellbeing of rank-and-file members as seen not only in Diana's abortion, conducted at a late stage and *against her will*, but also in the lack of basic toiletries, uniforms, and food. She said the commanders were solely interested in money and civilian women. The family she found in the FARC no longer cared for her, their actions did not correspond with their rhetorical claims for fraternity and solidarity in the organization.³⁵ In addition, the FARC has made public statements which suggest the claims of women like Diana, who indicate they have been subject to forced abortions, are not true.³⁶

However, not all women combatants experience war in the same way. Their bodies are not all subject to the same types of violence, or to the same love and care practices. For instance, Eugenia requested enrolment in the late-nineties, when she was eleven years old, to escape from a violent household.³⁷ She liked being in the FARC, a group she also thought of as her family, and she is still grateful to her recruiter for having saved her, in her own words, from her abusive parents.

My family was the FARC because I wanted to run away from abuse in my family. I didn't want to be touched. I didn't want to be hurt. Because I have my body, and I have my scars. My family gave me these scars. How ironic, after all those years of combat I have no scars given by the FARC. (Realmente mi familia fue las FARC porque yo quería huir de mi casa por el maltrato, yo no quería que nadie me tocara, que nadie me maltratara. Porque, por lo menos, yo tengo mi cuerpo, yo tengo marcas, tengo marcas de mi familia. Incluso, imagínate, tengo marcas de mi familia. Qué cosa, que [en] el grupo armado tenía muchos combates y nunca me lo hicieron.)

She refused on several occasions to press charges against her commander for child recruitment. Eugenia was also forced to use hormonal contraception in the form of injections; she was never pregnant. She left the FARC because she was captured by the Colombian Military after five years of enlistment, when she was sixteen years old and doing militia work in a city, not because she wished to leave. She was angry for being captured and forcibly enrolled in the reintegration program for minors,³⁸ but she had planned to go back to the FARC when she turned eighteen. The main reason for her not to

re-join the guerrillas was because she realized she was pregnant and decided not to go back to the FARC, so she could be a mother. She now thinks that deciding to continue with her unexpected pregnancy and to re-build her life as a civilian were good choices. She is a single mother; she works as a nurse assistant at a clinic for terminal cancer and AIDS patients, and goes to college on a full scholarship. Her main goal in life is to work assisting former combatants in their reintegration processes.

Regarding similar situations, Alejandra, former ELN member, had two children while she was a guerrilla. The armed group supported her during her pregnancies and allowed family visits. Alejandra, just as Diana, joined the guerrillas when she was seventeen or eighteen years old, sometime in the first half of the 1980s, mostly because she was promised financial assistance for her family and access to education—her father worked the land and she had nine siblings. Alejandra also liked weapons. About a week after joining the ELN she wanted to go back to her family, but she was not allowed to. She had to serve in the guerrillas for a minimum of three years before she could request leave. However, when the time came she no longer thought about leaving: the initial promises were not honored, but she had already adapted to her new life as a guerrilla, and she liked it. In addition, after five years of being in the armed group, Alejandra met her life partner. They requested authorization to be together, and two years later they requested permission to have their first child.³⁹ Her two children were raised by Alejandra's and her partner's family members, in civilian contexts. They could stay in touch and they were also allowed to see each other occasionally. In the ELN contraception is also compulsory, and this armed group does not provide care and support for pregnancies outside of an authorized relationship. When I asked Alejandra about these, she said:

Yes, couples are allowed to have children, but only after three years of being together and if you prove to be in a committed relationship. If you can't prove this, the ELN does not provide care or support for you and your baby.... No one is forced to have abortions, what happens is that if you are not in a committed relationship and you get pregnant, they tell you they will not take care of you during your pregnancy and that when the baby is born, they will not help you to safely relocate the child. (Sí pueden tener hijos, pero allá solo a partir de los tres años, y si es una pareja estable. Pero si no es una pareja estable, no le responden por el bebé.... Allá no obligan a nadie a abortar sino que ya le dicen, si esa persona no es estable [si no tiene una para estable] y queda embarazada antes de tiempo le dicen que ella responde porque allá no le responden por él, no le van a decir a dónde lo ubica o que allá le van a ver [que le van a cuidar] por el bebé.)

Alejandra spent twenty-eight years in the ELN guerrillas; she was a surgeon and said life was good there, that she had all the basic needs satisfied:

My life was good there because, firstly, I did not have to worry in case I needed something, like underwear, or a dress for example. Because in the guerrillas they provide whatever one needs. If you get sick they will spend all the money that is needed for you to get better. They have no problem in spending a hundred, two hundred million [Colombian] pesos.⁴⁰ Whatever you need, they give it to you. (Yo estaba bien allá porque, a ver, en primer lugar yo no me tenía que preocupar porque yo necesito, digamos, unos interiores, necesito un vestido porque eso sí, allá le dan a uno lo que necesite, si uno se enferma allá le gastan a uno hasta el último peso, allá no les duele gastarle cien, doscientos millones [de pesos colombianos], lo que necesite.)

In spite of that, during our conversation, her description of her situation in the armed group did not correspond with her initial statements of general care and wellbeing. Alejandra told me she left the ELN partly due to the death of her parents, of some close friends in the guerrillas, and because her children repeatedly asked her to desert. Her mother had been sick for months, and she was not allowed to visit her before she died. This situation was extremely painful for her. In addition, she recalled the multiple changes the ELN had been through in the course of the twenty-eight years she was an active member. Among these changes, and echoing the words of Diana, Alejandra also expressed her disillusionment in relation to the commanders, and the internal dynamics of the group. Her commander, she said, was only interested in his own family and his partner, not the wellbeing of the file and rank. An additional issue of real concern for her was the lack of military experience and proper training among new recruits. "Some people there, they don't even know how to disassemble a rifle. What is one supposed to do, say, in the middle of combat, if a bullet gets stuck? You either run, or let the military kill you, or let them capture you, what else are you supposed to do?" (Hay personas allá que no saben ni siquiera desarmar un fusil, entonces dígame usted uno en una pelea [combate] y que un tiro se le trabe y ¿qué hace? Ahí corra o déjese coger o déjese matar, porque qué más.) Learning basic skills for survival and defense in war situations was not part of their lives; therefore her comrades were not capable of taking care of themselves or other group-members. There was no guarantee of reciprocal care and protection during combat, in case she really needed it. A turning point for her was to be left alone after combat with four wounded comrades for three months, barely surviving. And so she made her decision and left. "I told myself, God has saved me. He has spared me from much harm. I'm leaving now." (Entonces yo dije no, Diosito me ha salvado, me ha favorecido de muchas cosas. Yo me voy.)

The situation of Susana, also a former ELN member, was quite different. When we met, Susana was pregnant; she was twenty years old. She requested enrolment in the guerrillas when she was sixteen years old. She did so because she was bored and tired of working—she worked at the coca plantations, collecting leaves. She was a *raspachín*, like the rest of her family.⁴¹ Susana thought that in the guerrillas people did nothing: before enlisting she said she could see members just wandering around, relaxed "It's like, you can always see those people [guerrillas] just hanging out. And I thought 'they are relaxed' and so I want to be relaxed too." (Como uno ve a esa gente que mantiene relajado por ahí, no más así. Yo dije "viven relajados" entonces también yo vivo relajada [yo también quiero vivir relajada].) She very soon regretted her choice: in the guerrillas she had to work much harder than she did when she worked as a *raspachín*, and she also realized she had to wait for three years before being able to request a leave. But Susana met her life partner just a month after joining the ELN and changed her mind about leaving. This same man was also the father of the child she was pregnant with during our interview; they were still together. Despite having a stable, authorized partner, Susana was forced to have an abortion the first time she got pregnant. The second time she realized she was pregnant, she decided to leave the group to avoid another forced abortion. Her pregnancy coincided with her third year as an ELN member, so she could request leave, which was granted. But, shortly after, the ELN called her back to the ranks.⁴² On her return, she was unaware that her commander had negotiated a collective demobilization with the Colombian Military. Her partner, who was still in the group, said he would agree to demobilize only if she was included in the demobilization.

Susana did not want to be in the guerrillas, but she did not want to surrender to the State, vía the Military. Her options, as well as those of other members, were limited: the commander had already submitted a list with full names of the front-members to the Military. Accordingly, their civilian identities were already compromised and criminal

records were in place. She was scared, and she also thought it was un-dignified for them to surrender to their enemy. Part of her ideological indoctrination had taught her that the Colombian government did not help the poor, that instead it exploited the poor, the land workers, and she had experienced this herself, as a civilian. So why should she believe now that the government would help her, a guerrillera? She recalled, for me, what she told her commander when they were discussing the collective demobilization:

[Addressing her commander] When I went through [ideological] school, we were told that the government did not help us as poor. And knowing that the government is exploiting people, why should we go there? That's like begging, for us who are guerrillas. For me, I said, I can't agree with doing something like that [demobilize and surrender]. And other comrades said "this is obvious" we are begging [to the government]. All that ideological indoctrination and we end up begging. ([Hablándole a su comandante] En un tiempo, que pasé escuela,⁴³ a nosotros no habían dicho que el gobierno a nosotros como pobres no nos ayudaba. Y sabiendo que el gobierno está explotando a la gente, por qué tenemos que nosotros ir allá, eso es como ir a pedirle cacao, nosotros como guerrilleros. Por mí, le dije, yo no estoy de acuerdo que hagamos una cosa de esas [desmovilizarse y entregarse]. Y que más de uno dijo "eso es obvio," eso es ir a pedirle cacao [al gobierno]. Tanta ideología que le meten a uno para uno llegar así [cambió tono de voz e hizo gesto de pedir limosna].)

Our interview took place just a few months after her demobilization.

The situations described in this article echo the experiences of other women and men who have joined the Colombian guerrillas, and provide an insight into structural situations which prove to be strong incentives for enlistment, as potential recruits see in the guerrillas a means to change their lives, and the lives of others for good. In the 1970s, Vásquez Perdomo considered the M-19 was a means for her to promote and achieve social justice; in the 1980s Alejandra saw in the ELN an opportunity to have access to education and provide financial support to her family; in the 1990s Eugenia found in the FARC, an illegal armed organization, protection from family violence; also in the 1990s Zenaída Rueda⁴⁴ was forcibly recruited to the FARC in order to protect her brothers, who had been targeted for recruitment. At the turn of the century, Diana believed the FARC would be her way out of poverty, social abandonment, and that she would be able to study. During the first decade of the 2000s Tatiana, who was forcibly recruited, did not consider the FARC was a means to improve her life but, nevertheless, found in it a way of living that she eventually appreciated and enjoyed; and just a few years ago Susana thought the ELN could offer her a way out of her life as a coca plantation worker, a raspachín, with no other future in sight. For most of these women, the guerrillas were a promise, a possibility to materialize their desires for a better future: social justice, access to education and social mobility, a life where having a rest from daily labor was an option. And while their lives did change, the initial promises were not fulfilled, and thousands of people have been affected by the violent actions of the organizations they once belonged to, both inside and outside the ranks.⁴⁵

This multiplicity of experiences also gives us an insight into the enormous challenge of social reintegration in Colombia. How does the reintegration assistance address all these experiences and related needs? In this article I have highlighted the varied ways in which female bodies are subject to sexual and reproductive rights policies within guerrilla organizations, while I have also addressed how affective transactions and expectations, the love-labor associated with the implementation of these policies and other affective socialization practices, influence everyday life and decision making in the guerrillas.

The life changes resulting from the decisions of these women in relation to their enrolment in the guerrillas, and in particular to those interviewed, are also indicative of the degree of agency they have, and the risks attached to their decisions. For Diana, the decision to desert was the result of her commanders' lack of care for her wellbeing, manifest in the scarcity of food and uniforms and her forced abortion. While deserting was a way for her to protect herself from further physical and emotional abuse, it also meant that she could be captured in the attempt and probably executed by the FARC. For Eugenia and Susana, exploring motherhood entailed assuming responsibilities for the life of someone else and, in the process, transforming their own lives. But I think that, for most ex-combatants—especially for those who were truly not allowed to have children, motherhood also symbolizes a strong demonstration of agency over their own bodies and a clear rupture with the armed group. Just as Eugenia did, many other women have avoided re-enlistment due to pregnancies. For Alejandra, deserting the guerrillas in her mid-fifties meant leaving behind decades of experience and skills in order to learn how to be a civilian; how to be a productive and competitive, self-sufficient citizen while other working women her age were already planning to retire? Through our interviews and conversations I learned former combatants truly appreciate reintegration assistance, but I also learned that former combatants themselves consider the lack of sensitive disaggregation regarding the design and implementation of reintegration programs ignores nuances and individual needs despite enormous, well intended and absolutely necessary institutional efforts to assist and effectively administer available resources.

Care Labor: Becoming Civilians

In closing this article I would like to go back to María Eugenia Vásquez Perdomo, former M-19 member. In her autobiography, Vásquez Perdomo recalls that her transition to civilian life was a painful process: she did no longer had a group that provided a sense of belonging, support and protection. Family and friends perceived her as a potential threat:

Almost all my acquaintances saw me as a bringer of death, a bearer of this danger because of my status as a wanted woman....I wanted with all my heart to try another path in life, but I was labeled a guerrillera and had the mark of death on my forehead.⁴⁶ (Casi todos los conocidos me percibían como una posibilidad de muerte, como una portadora de peligro en mi carácter de perseguida. En esos momentos, con todo el corazón quise ensayar otras opciones de vida, pero estaba etiquetada como guerrillera, con la marca de muerte sobre la frente.)⁴⁷

In addition to her experiences of stigmatization, Bogotá, the city where she had been a militant for the M-19 and was now her civilian home, was a constant reminder of the comrades, lovers, and dear friends who died due to the war: the streets, cafés, parks were all part of her personal archaeology of loss. And the city itself was invaded by architectural ruins of confrontations between the M-19 and the Colombian Military.⁴⁸ At the time of her disassociation from the armed group there was no social reintegration assistance for individual ex-combatants who decided to dessert and could do so,⁴⁹ but she knew and sometimes met with several people who were also going through the same re-adaptation process she was:

We got together and the memories began to flow. In this way we helped each other analyze the past and begin to create new identities for ourselves. Laughing at ourselves and our own sorrows became the best therapy. Little by little, through listening to each other talk about the difficulties with the day-to-day, a picture of our common problem began to emerge. We knew that we had to proceed from here on out on our own; the group didn't shelter us anymore. But at least we had each other, and these talks helped us feel less alone. We

knew that we were no better or worse than our compas who remained within the M-19, just different.⁵⁰ (Nos juntábamos y comenzaba a fluir esa energía pegajosa que nos enredaba en recuerdos y terminaba aportando algunos elementos de análisis, útiles para la individualidad que ahora construíamos. Reírnos de nosotros mismos y nuestras angustias se convertía en la mejor terapia. Poco a poco, mientras alguien comentaba sus dificultades con el día a día y lo dramática que resultaba la cotidianidad más elemental, se iba esbozando una muestra de nuestra problemática común. También hacíamos conciencia de que estábamos condenados a resolverla desde una perspectiva individual. Sin embargo, esas tertulias eran claves para sentirnos menos solos, aunque fuese por momentos. Y entender que no éramos ni mejores ni peores que los demás, simplemente distintos.)⁵¹

Challenges to civilian adaptation vary from learning how to walk across the street, handling money, learning how to access systems of healthcare and education, solving conflict through conversations to building new affective relationships, among others. For this transition and learning process Vásquez Perdomo did not receive any assistance through reintegration programs. Going back to college to complete her undergraduate studies in anthropology was for her a strategy which helped her cope with change. Writing her dissertation, which later on became her award winning autobiography, was a means to understand her past, how it affected her present, and helped her shape her future. In other words, writing her autobiography to complete the degree provided her with the analytical tools to make sense of her life as a guerrilla and of the changes she was going through as she tried to adapt to civilian life. This academic qualification also increased her social mobility.

Since Vásquez Perdomo's demobilization in 1989, multiple reintegration programs and initiatives have been implemented. Reintegration assistance aims at full economic, political, and social assimilation into civil society for ex-combatants and their families.⁵² But reintegration does not only entail securing assimilation, it is a process of transformation, of discovery, and rediscovery of oneself in a *place* and *stage* where all previous identity references and practices of belonging are lost. In my research I understand reintegration as a performative process enabled by government institutions, rehearsed and performed in civilian contexts. In this sense, the process of reintegration is simultaneously a performance of transformation and transportation which involves all members of society.⁵³ Assistance provided for this purpose is a combination of love-labor and secondary care-labor. Lynch and Walsh argue that in secondary care-labor relations carers must identify subjects' needs for care and how these can be met. While secondary care-labor relations "involve care responsibilities and attachments, they do not carry the same depth of feeling or moral obligation (as primary care or love relations do) in terms of meeting dependency needs, especially long-term dependency needs [...] There is a degree of choice and contingency about secondary care relations that does not apply to primary relations."⁵⁴ Through a small sample, this article shows the heterogeneous qualities of former female combatants: their personal resources and experiences vary, their ample age-range, the time spent in the guerrillas, the affective dimensions of the multiple stages of their involvement, from recruitment to desertion.⁵⁵ Why is affective labor important for reintegration and how does reintegration assistance address all these variables?

When asked about in which ways they think reintegration assistance has helped them in the process of transition and adaptation to civilian life, most interviewees expressed their happiness regarding the possibility of studying. Eugenia, for instance, completed a technical degree to be a nurse assistant thanks to the reintegration program. This has enabled her to work and financially support herself and her child. Tatiana, who at the time

of our interview did not have a job, completed a technical degree on cabinet making. For her the most important thing has been to be able to learn, to “acquire knowledge” through the education and vocational training she has had access to via government reintegration programs. She said reintegration is for her to be able to have the life that she deserves *here* and not *there*, to be able to share with people she has not met, with people the FARC might have victimized, and help them. She wants to be a psychologist and she wants to work with former combatants and also provide assistance to other vulnerable communities.

Susana, on the other hand, was having a hard time with her studies. She said she could not do it and that she did not like it. While her dream was to be a nurse, and she was aware that she needed to study to be able to fulfil her desires, she was not very optimistic about her study-skills.

I like [the idea of] studying to be a nurse, but I don't like going to school. I know how to give first aid, but I don't like going to school.... I like doing things, that's the way I learn.... I know that if I see how other people do things I will learn, but I don't want to go to school. That's my main problem. (A mí me gusta mucho estudiar enfermería, pero no me gusta estudiar, ir a la escuela. Yo sé los primeros auxilios, pero no me gusta ir al colegio.... Me gusta hacer, porque yo con mirar aprendo.... Yo sé que yo veo como lo hacen y yo voy a aprender, pero yo no quiero ir a la escuela. Ese es el problema mío.)

This is a common situation among former combatants who have difficulties adapting to academic education: it is easier for them to learn by practice, as this is what they used to do in the armed group. In this sense, they are no different from dancers, who also learn by practice.⁵⁶ However, what Susana appreciated the most was the support she received from her personal tutor and the care and guidance provided by her to improve and sustain her romantic relationship, to be more confident about herself, to cope and work through her fears regarding motherhood. She appreciated the kindness of all the staff at the ACR “People are kind here. It seems as if they were all the same person. One feels good.” (Todos son sencillos. Parece que fueran todos una sola persona. Aquí uno se siente bien.) Interviewees, with very few exceptions, were overall pleased with face-to-face interactions with ACR members.

Despite the good thoughts and sincere appreciation, interviewees were also very critical about assistance. Eugenia, for instance, recalled the years she was subject to the Colombian Family Institute for Welfare (hereafter ICBF) reintegration program. She said they lived “locked up,” like prisoners. (Mantenía uno muy encerrado. Como prisioneros.) She said the program did not take into account their own experiences and background and that excessive surveillance, presented as protective measures, was counterproductive in her need to learn how to be independent, to become an adult.

When you leave an institution that has sheltered you, a place where you have been provided food and you find yourself feeling hunger, struggling to get on with things on daily basis, it's very hard. They were very overprotective and with this they failed to teach us, to prepare us to be independent. (Cuando usted sale de un programa donde lo han mantenido a uno, donde le han dado de comer, a salirse a no comer, a enfrentarse [con la cotidianidad] es algo muy duro. Ellos eran muy autoprotectores [sobreprotectores], pero también no lo capacitaban a uno para que uno fuera independiente.)⁵⁷

Regarding assistance and training for her to be able to provide for herself and her child, to be a productive, independent citizen, Eugenia mentioned she attended many workshops

and courses that were not compatible with her interests and strengths. She considers these were a waste of time for her, and that the state was wasting valuable resources. According to Eugenia, if her carers at the time had been really invested in identifying her own interests and needs, they would have been more efficient in delivering secondary-care assistance. Eleven years had gone by since her demobilization and she thinks that if she had been provided qualitative care, more opportunities and help to discover who she was, what her strengths were, instead of being subject to quantitative policy implementation, she would have graduated from college already. Tatiana had a similar experience also while she was subject to ICBF care: she was initially enrolled on a cosmetology course she did not like. She purposely avoided attending until she failed to complete this training. She then moved on to a cabinet-making course which she finished.⁵⁸ Thoughtful consideration and planning from her carers, and more dialogue with her could result in efficient management of available resources.

Eugenia's claims for the importance of more personalized assistance are evident considering the vast multiplicity of persons who are subject to reintegration. To further discuss the affective-importance of personalized assistance I will now focus on Alejandra and Diana.⁵⁹ Alejandra deserted the ELN after twenty-eight years of service; she was a surgeon in the ELN and has over two decades of experience in healthcare, from minor ailments to war-related injuries. She is in her mid-fifties, unemployed, and is not happy about the reintegration assistance. Despite her skills and advanced age (in relation to Susana for instance, who was at a similar stage in her reintegration route), Alejandra has to fulfill the same requirements as all other persons in the process of reintegration: she has to finish her primary and secondary education before she can apply for college or to obtain a technical degree and be competitive in the job market. At the time of our interview, the ACR had no system in place to take advantage of former combatants' skills and experiences in order to grant degrees to individuals who can prove they are sufficiently trained and experienced in a particular area.⁶⁰ Alejandra has decades of experience; Susana also had knowledge and experience in providing first aid care and assistance. But the skills and expertise of these women, which are relevant and could potentially reduce costs in their respective reintegration routes, are not accepted in civilian contexts. Alejandra thinks studying is important, but she is more concerned about finding a job that helps her to be independent, to feel useful and provide for herself. She was more interested in being able to work and earn a living by legal means. Her monthly stipend, she argued, was not enough to pay her rent, transportation and food.⁶¹ She admitted the only reason she attended school and the mandatory ACR workshops and tutoring meetings was because she received a stipend. But if she had a job, she wouldn't bother going back to the ACR. In this sense, the ACR was not providing enough incentives and appropriate care to secure her willful retention, other than judicial and legal benefits.⁶²


Diana, who deserted the FARC, was depressed and did not receive help to overcome her pain, to mourn the loss of her child, and her family. She was a file-and-rank member, who did not learn any particular skills that could make her employable. When I asked what were the things the ACR provided her with, she mentioned the stipend, education, and psychosocial assistance. The latter consisted of monthly, group meetings. Despite being diagnosed with Posttraumatic Stress Disorder (PTSD) Diana told me that she did not receive additional assistance, other than the group counseling. In these sessions they talked about what it means to be a *civilized* person—thus implying guerrillas are “barbarians,” they watched films, they shared stories aimed at increasing their confidence in the reintegration process. She did not find these were helpful for her.⁶³ Diana has recurrent nightmares related to the FARC, and she mentioned these decreased and she felt better in general while she attended a three-month yoga workshop provided by the




ACR.⁶⁴ The course ended, and despite the evidence of benefit to participants, these workshops were discontinued. We talked about job possibilities, about how the ACR was preparing her for the job market, and what type of jobs she thought she could be good at. She said she could work as a cleaner, that she could be a good cook, and that she enjoyed taking care of others, especially children and the elderly. Anything, except office jobs, she said. “I don’t know anything about computers.” (Eso de sistemas uno no sabe.) But, according to her, the ACR did not help her to get a job and she did not even know how to prepare a resume—*hoja de vida*—or an application. When I asked Diana what she thought reintegration is and what she needs to reintegrate to society, she said reintegration is synonym of being a good person, “ser una persona de bien,” and that all she needs to be able to reintegrate is to stay away from weapons and not go back to the armed group, “dejar las armas, no volver al grupo.” It all sounds very good, very sweet and gentle, but being a good person and avoiding recidivism does not make her employable. It does not help her learn socialization skills. It does not help her cope with her loss, to learn how to breathe, get out of bed and keep going when her pain and sadness take over her days. It does not enable her to get a job and earn a living.

Affective labors are central aspects of recruitment, retention, and reintegration. Desires for more dignifying living and survival motivate people to enroll, remain, or defect from armed organizations. These same desires and expectations are also important in the process of learning how to become a civilian, and as such should be taken into account in designing reintegration assistance. But such considerations must go beyond declarations or the production of reports and documents, which are not translated to concrete action. If a Colombian citizen involved in illegal activities decides to leave the armed organization she belongs to, the promised assistance for her to be able to build a new life in civilian contexts must correspond to the needs for care of these subjects of reintegration. The challenge requires an enormous creative effort: former combatants need relevant, useful, qualitative assistance in the process of re-discovering themselves in civilian contexts. Former combatants need to re-create themselves in order to be able to be functioning persons. In this article, I have focused on the affective labors of citizens’ involvement in warfare in order to expand ex-combatants’ narrative-possibilities for existence. This is an attempt to contribute to fulfil the promise of intelligibility and highlight the importance of qualitative reintegration assistance in the transition from combatant to civilian identities. But it is not only *them*, ex-combatants, the ones who need to undergo a transformation: civilians are also subjects of reintegration. Civilians must be willing to realize that former combatants are part of everyday life: some of them work in restaurants, hospitals, banks, and supermarkets while others are trying to understand how to move on with their lives. Others fail in their attempt to adapt to their new contexts: they go back to the armed groups or they are murdered in the adjustment process. Civilians must be willing to realize that ex-combatants are also Colombian citizens. They must allow themselves—ourselves—to *listen* to those who have built their lives while waging war. We must be willing to *listen* and address the needs of those who have lived, lost, and loved in the battlefield.

Notes

1. The interviews selected for this article were conducted in 2014, in multiple cities in Colombia (Bogotá, Cali, Medellín). Some of these semi-structured, in-depth interviews were conducted thanks to the generous support of the Colombian Agency for Reintegration (ACR) and the Peace and Reconciliation Program (PPR). The ACR is the government institution that designs and implements public policy on reintegration for adults. The PPR is an education institution which implements a basic primary and secondary education program tailored for ex-combatants,

members of communities vulnerable to violence, and victims of the armed conflict. Interviews were also conducted in participants' homes, over several visits. In these cases, contact was established directly with potential interviewees, and not through the above-mentioned institutions. The purpose of approaching potential participants through various routes was to collect information in locations where interviewees felt most comfortable, outside of government-run institutions, thus enabling them to express opinions more freely. The names of participants have been changed and the specific dates and locations where interviews were conducted are not disclosed in order to protect their identities. Opinions expressed in this article are the author's responsibility and do not reflect those of the above-mentioned institutions, my co-editor or this journal. 

2. In my conversations, the examples for punishment for refusing to follow orders, including selective-execution orders, varied: from having to work in the kitchen (*rancha*) more often, collect wood, dig trenches, to being murdered. The memory of the brutality and fear of being punished was present in our conversations, but former guerrillas clearly explained that, despite all the violence that characterizes most disciplining technologies within the ranks, there is a strict procedure to establish which kind of punishment corresponds to each violation. Accordingly, these were not arbitrary—even if it may be perceived like that. While, during enrollment interviewees could not express their opinions or discontent, now they could say what they really thought about this system, for instance that it was not a good, fair one; that it did not contribute to their personal growth. In my conversations people wanted me to really understand that there was an order to life in the ranks with clear rules and steps that they knew about and, for multiple reasons from avoiding extra work to diminishing the risks of being murdered, decided to follow. But even with all precautions, sometimes combatants were punished or executed with no apparent reason. 
3. The ELN was founded in 1964. This group is rooted in the Liberal guerrilla movements of the first half of the Twentieth century and was deeply influenced by the 1959 Cuban Revolution and the success of the rebels of the Sierra Maestra. Initially comprised mostly of students, members of workers' unions, and intellectuals, this group was also influenced by the thought and work of Marxist-Christians in an early stage of the Theology of Liberation. This group has participated in several peace dialogues with the Colombian government since the 1980s. Dissident factions of the ELN demobilized during the 1990s. This group is still active and is the second largest guerrilla organization in the Americas. 
4. The FARC are rooted in Liberal guerrilla movements of the first half of the Twentieth century, and were officially founded also in 1964. This guerrilla organization was initially comprised mostly by agricultural workers, their cooperatives, and was supported by the Communist party. Since the 1980s the FARC has engaged in peace dialogues with the Colombian government. The FARC is the largest guerrilla organization of the Americas. Since September 2012 and to the time of this writing (Summer 2016), it has been in peace dialogues with the government of President Juan Manuel Santos. On June 23, 2016, the final ceasefire agreement was signed in Havana, Cuba. 
5. While childhood and experiences of childhood vary significantly according to cultural contexts, in this article a child is understood as any person below the age of eighteen and a child soldier is any person under eighteen years of age associated to an armed organizations, in any capacity. See Sunkanya Podder, "Neither Child nor Soldiers: Contested Terrains in Identity," in *Child Soldiers: From Recruitment to Reintegration*, eds. Alpaslan Ozerdem and Sukanya Podder (Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan, 2011); and Michael G. Wessells, *Child Soldiers: From Violence to*

Protection (Cambridge, MA and London: Harvard University Press, 2009). The recruitment of children is considered a war crime. See UNICEF, "Cape Town Principles and Best Practices" (Cape Town: UNICEF, 1997). [↗](#)

6. Judith Butler, *The Psychic Life of Power: Theories in Subjection* (Palo Alto: Stanford University Press, 1997), 7. [↗](#)
7. Judith Butler, *Bodies That Matter: On the Discursive Limits of "Sex"* (New York: Routledge, 1993), xiii, xxiv.; Judith Butler, "Violence, Mourning, Politics," in *Precarious Life: The Powers of Mourning and Violence* (London ; New York: Verso, 2004). [↗](#)
8. Scott Gates, "Why Do Children Fight? Motivations and the Mode of Recruitment," in *Child Soldiers: From Recruitment to Reintegration*, eds. Alpaslan Ozerdem and Sukanya Podder (Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan, 2011), 30. [↗](#)
9. I developed an initial insight of the affective worlds and affective labor of former combatants and reintegration assistance while working on arts-based reintegration programs and initiatives in Colombia between 2011 and 2012. [↗](#)
10. Kathleen Lynch and Judy Walsh, "Love, Care and Solidarity: What Is and Is Not Commodifiable," ed. Kathleen Lynch, John Baker, and Maureen Lyons (Basingstoke ; New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2009), 36. [↗](#)
11. Ibid., 42. [↗](#)
12. Ibid., 44. [↗](#)
13. All translations in this text are mine, unless otherwise stated. [↗](#)
14. Zenaida Rueda Calderón, *Confesiones De Una Guerrillera. Los Secretos De Tirofijo, Jojoy Ya Las Farc, Revelados Por Primera Vez*. (Bogotá: Editorial Planeta, 2009), 104. [↗](#)
15. Participation in this study was on voluntary basis, there was no payment announced or made. I am deeply grateful for the generosity and kindness of interviewees and members of staff, who provided logistic support. For the purposes of this article I limited the analysis to five out of a total of thirty-two semi-structured in-depth interviews. Accordingly, findings and conclusions are also informed by my larger research. All the names of interviewees have been changed, and the specific cities where each interview was conducted, and dates, are not disclosed in order to protect participants' identities. [↗](#)
16. Tatiana's wording here is related to cultural understandings of masculinity, suggesting men are not interested in engaging in long-term, romantic, or affective relationships. [↗](#)
17. The wording she used in Spanish was "*dormimos juntos*," which could mean they slept in the same tent, but it does not imply that they had sexual intercourse. But her following words, indicating she had never slept with anyone before, suggest she was forced to have sex with him, that she was raped. The words chosen by interviewees and the speed with which they spoke, along with their posture, gestures and movements helped me understand many things which were unspoken. Tatiana did not say she was raped, this is my own interpretation. [↗](#)
18. Lynch and Walsh, "Love, Care and Solidarity," 44. [↗](#)
19. The M-19 emerged in 1973 in response to fraud on the 1970 presidential elections. It was comprised of students, dissidents of other guerrillas, and members of the middle and working class. Since its beginnings, M-19 gained broad following and popularity due to their unusual military tactics and humorous interventions in the public sphere. Its popularity was seriously damaged in the 1980s due to various violent attacks on government institutions and civilian populations. Also in the 1980s, this guerrilla group participated in multiple peace dialogues with two


different governments, demobilized in 1989 and signed the final peace agreement in 1990. [↗](#)

20. Maria Eugenia Vasquez Perdomo, *My Life as a Colombian Revolutionary: Reflections of a Former Guerrilla*, trans. Lorena Terando (Philadelphia: Temple University Press, 2005), 76. [↗](#)
21. Maria Eugenia Vasquez Perdomo, *Escrito Para No Morir: Bitácora De Una Militancia* (Colombia: Ministerio de Cultura, 2000), 145. [↗](#)
22. Ibid., 145–6. [↗](#)
23. Vasquez Perdomo, *My Life as a Colombian Revolutionary*, 62. [↗](#)
24. Vasquez Perdomo, *Escrito Para No Morir*, 121. [↗](#)
25. Vasquez Perdomo, *My Life as a Colombian Revolutionary*, 62. [↗](#)
26. Vasquez Perdomo, *Escrito Para No Morir*, 121–22. [↗](#)
27. Vasquez Perdomo, *My Life as a Colombian Revolutionary*, 187. [↗](#)
28. Vasquez Perdomo, *Escrito Para No Morir*, 336. [↗](#)
29. Vasquez Perdomo, *My Life as a Colombian Revolutionary*, 196. [↗](#)
30. Vasquez Perdomo, *Escrito Para No Morir*, 351. [↗](#)
31. Vasquez Perdomo, *My Life as a Colombian Revolutionary*, 230. [↗](#)
32. Vasquez Perdomo, *Escrito Para No Morir*, 410. [↗](#)
33. I have elsewhere discussed the ideological dimensions of guerrilla warfare. For more on commanders' ideological discourses and the views and experiences of rank-and-file guerrilla members see María Estrada-Fuentes, "Becoming Citizens: Loss and Desire in the Social Reintegration of Guerrilla Ex-Combatants in Colombia," in *Gendered Citizenship: Manifestations and Performance*, eds. Bishnupriya Dutt, Janelle Reinelt, and Shrinkhla Sahai (London: Palgrave Macmillan, 2017), forthcoming. [↗](#)
34. All interviews conducted in institutional settings took place over food: coffee or tea and snacks, such as cookies or chocolates, provided by me or the institution I was visiting. During the days of institutional-based interviews I carried pens, color pencils, and notebooks with me. I provided these once the interview had finished, as a gesture of gratitude and appreciation. I gave pens and/or notebooks often, and I gave the color pencils to interviewees who had children who would appreciate them. When I was invited to conduct interviews over several house visits, lunch or breakfast and morning or afternoon snacks were prepared. In these cases we cooked together (not that I was allowed to do much!) and we went to the shops together. In some occasions I was allowed to pay for some of the produce. [↗](#)
35. FARC, "Estatuto Farc-Ep," (Colombia: Novena Conferencia FARC-EP, 2007), 14. [↗](#)
36. Secretariado del estado Mayor de las FARC-EP, "Las Guerrilleras Son Mujeres Revolucionarias, Conscientes Y Libres," *Mujer Fariana*, January 2, 2016, accessed October 2, 2016, <http://www.mujerfariana.org/vision/declaraciones/466-las-guerrilleras-son-mujeres-revolucionarias-conscientes-y-libres.html?tmpl=component&print=1&layout>. [↗](#)
37. Eugenia was rejected the first time she requested to join the FARC because she was too young. When she requested to be a member for the second time, she lied about her age and said that she was 15 years old, the minimum required age for FARC recruitment. She joined the FARC with her aunt, who died during a combat just a few months later. [↗](#)
38. *The Instituto Colombiano de Bienestar Familiar*—Colombian Institute for Family Welfare, hereafter ICBF—is the government institution that designs and implements public policy on reintegration for persons under the age of eighteen. When coming of

age, persons in the process of reintegration who were subject to the ICBF can decide whether to continue with the ACR or not. [↗](#)

39. Alejandra said there is a minimum time requirement of three years in a relationship before being able to request authorization to have children. But they were both veteran guerrillas, with good records so an exception was made. [↗](#)
40. Approximately US \$35,000 to \$70,000 in October 2016. [↗](#)
41. Raspachín is a colloquial term in Colombia to refer to coca plantation workers whose main duty is to collect the leaves. [↗](#)
42. When leave requests are approved, former ELN members are part of a “military reserve” and can be called back to duty anytime. [↗](#)
43. Escuela refers here to ideological education and indoctrination. [↗](#)
44. See above. [↗](#)
45. I have elsewhere discussed the cycles of promise and desire former combatants go through before, during and after their association with the guerrillas. Estrada-Fuentes, “Becoming Citizens.” [↗](#)
46. Vasquez Perdomo, *My Life as a Colombian Revolutionary*, 232. [↗](#)
47. Vasquez Perdomo, *Escrito Para No Morir*, 417. [↗](#)
48. On November 6th and 7th, 1985 the M-19 guerrillas besieged the Palace of Justice, house of the Colombian Supreme Court of Justice. During the operation, the guerrillas held hostage the Magistrates of the Supreme court, employees and other civilians. The counter-siege intervention of the Colombian Military and resulting confrontations with the guerrillas resulted in the complete destruction of the building. Over a hundred people died, among employees, guerrillas, and other civilians. Students, guerrillas, and civilians that were rescued from the building were later tortured or murdered by members of the Colombian Military, and eleven persons were disappeared. The Colombian Palace of Justice was still in ruins, awaiting reconstruction, in 1989. [↗](#)
49. Since 1994, combatants who, individually, choose to desert the guerrillas can receive legal benefits and reintegration assistance. [↗](#)
50. Vasquez Perdomo, *My Life as a Colombian Revolutionary*, 240. [↗](#)
51. Vasquez Perdomo, *Escrito Para No Morir*, 432. [↗](#)
52. Anders Nilsson, *Reintegrating Ex-Combatants in Post-Conflict Societies* (Stockholm: Swedish International Development Cooperation Agency (SIDA), 2005), 4, 29. [↗](#)
53. Richard Schechner, “Performers and Spectators Transported and Transformed,” *The Kenyon Review* 3, no. 4 (1981), 91. [↗](#)
54. Kathleen Lynch, John Baker, and Maureen Lyons, *Affective Equality: Love, Care and Injustice* (New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2009), 43-46. [↗](#)
55. In 2014, when these interviews were conducted, there were 30,612 former combatants subject to the ACR reintegration program. For up-to-date data on the number of ex-combatants enrolled in the ACR reintegration program see www.reintegracion.gov.co [↗](#)
56. Martha Graham, “I Am a Dancer,” in *The Routledge Dance Studies Reader*, ed. Alexandra Carter and Janet O’Shea (London and New York: Routledge, 2010), 95. [↗](#)
57. For more on how reintegration assistance for former child soldiers ignores the real needs of beneficiaries, see Steven A. Zyck, “‘But I’m a Man’: The Imposition of Childhood on and Denial of Identity and Economic Opportunity to Afghanistan’s Child Soldiers,” in *Child Soldiers: From Recruitment to Reintegration*, eds. Alpaslan Ozerdem and Sukanya Podder (Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan, 2011), 163-168. [↗](#)

58. While, for Eugenia, being a nurse assistant has provided her with the improvement of her social mobility, I do not have enough information to say whether this has been the case for Tatiana. However, in both cases, being able to complete a technical degree, which can lead to being competitive in the job market, provides former combatants with a sense of achievement which is extremely valuable. [↗](#)
59. At the time of these interviews, the ACR had recently introduced a new strategy to assist former combatants (just a few months preceding my interviews). Persons in the Process of Reintegration (PPR) are now assigned personal tutors who supervise the reintegration process (tutor to PPR ratio is around 1:50). The new reintegration route consists of eight dimensions (health, education, productivity, psychosocial, security, housing, family, personal), which are explored and planned according to the particular needs and expectations of each beneficiary. During a research visit on October 2015, I was told by ACR members of staff that this new system was still being adjusted. [↗](#)
60. The government document that describes the new reintegration modality includes a section that suggests there will be alternative certification routes for former combatants who have received training or are skilled in a specific area. Certifications are subject to an evaluation process where each person will have to demonstrate their abilities. From ACR internal document. Accessed by courtesy of the institution. Adriana López Mesa et al., "Dimensiones De La Ruta De Reintegración. Conceptualización Y Logros," ed. Dirección Programática de Reintegración (Bogotá, Colombia: Agencia Colombiana Para la Reintegración de Personas y Grupos Alzados en Armas, 2014). [↗](#)
61. The stipend is approximatedly \$150 US per month, and it is only given if the participants attend all the activities scheduled for them each month. If they fail to attend, they do not receive the money. For more on excombatant's thoughts regarding the ACR stipend and regulations, see Estrada-Fuentes, "Becoming Citizens." [↗](#)
62. These include pardon for illegal activities such as rebellion, unauthorized use of military uniforms, and excludes, for instance, crimes against humanity. [↗](#)
63. On interview with Dario Villamizar Herrera (2014), who was close to the M-19 and worked on designing and implementing reintegration assistance in the 1990s, I learned that regular meetings to watch films or share coffee and food aimed at providing group support to persons in the process of reintegration, were common during the 1990s and some did find them useful. In this article I have also included the thoughts of Vasquez Perdomo on the benefit of holding group meetings with people undergoing the same process. [↗](#)
64. Around 40% of ACR beneficiaries suffer from PTSD. In 2010, a pilot study to evaluate the efficacy of utilizing Satyananda Yoga in the treatment of PTSD in ex-combatants of guerrilla and paramilitary groups was conducted in Colombia. The success of this pilot study resulted in the implementation of the twelve-week protocol two more times, in 2012 and 2013. The pilot study and subsequent re-implementations of the protocol demonstrated that the use of Satyananda Yoga is safe and effective in the treatment of PTSD symptoms, more than pharmacological treatments. Access to government documents courtesy of the ACR: de Personas y Grupos Alzados en Armas Agencia Colombiana para la Reintegracion, "Salud Mental. Ahimsa: Yoga Para La Reconciliación," (Bogotá: Presidencia de la República, 2013);

José Daniel Toledo Arenas, José Posada Villa, and María Adelaida López, *Ensayo Clínico Aleatorio Abierto Y Controlado Para Evaluar La Eficacia Y Seguridad De El Uso De Yoga Satyananda Por Doce Semanas En Sujetos Excombatientes No Militares Del Conflicto Armado Colombiano* (Bogotá, Colombia: Dunna Alternativas Creativas Para la Paz, N.A). In a different context, the Stanford School of Medicine in association with Stanford's Center for Compassion and Altruism Research and Education has provided significant evidence on the benefit of implementing meditation and mindfulness practices to treat and reduce PTSD symptoms in war veterans. See E. M. Seppala et al., "Breathing-Based Meditation Decreases Posttraumatic Stress Disorder Symptoms in U.S. Military Veterans: A Randomized Controlled Longitudinal Study," *J Trauma Stress* 27.4 (2014). 



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